

Topic	The Gospel and Integrity
Reference	1-Thessalonians 2:1 – 13
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HISTORY

Thessalonica is the capital of the province of Macedonia. It is a Greek city. Ancient Thessalonica was a coastal city with a port. It is situated under northern part of an agency. Therefore, you will see people coming from all over the known world in those days to trade. There were also a lot of Roman soldiers marching up and down because Thessalonica happens to be in the crossroad between the eastern part and the western part of the Roman Empire. So anybody wanting to travel from Rome in the West, going to a place like Turkey in the east, they would have to pass through Thessalonica. It was a self-governing city, it was a very free city and therefore in Thessalonica you have both Roman influence, Greek influence, you have different beliefs, different cultures and languages from different parts of the world, all congregating in that city.

Against the backdrop you get to see Mount Olympus, which is the home of the Greek gods. So the upshot of all this is that we have a pagan city that is filled with diverse cultures, creeds, all sorts of beliefs, cults, religions and philosophical systems. It is not uncommon to be walking past the market square and seeing people debating and arguing about the meaning of life, because the Greek prize themselves in having wisdom and having figure out right the meaning of life. So it is against such a backdrop that the Thessalonian church was founded.

From 1st chapter we saw that how Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians reminded them of their conversion experience. Indeed, Paul, Silas and Timothy had a highly successful ministry in Thessalonica. Paul was full of praise for the young believers there after he had learnt that in spite of persecution the Thessalonians had persevered in their work of faith, labor of love and held steadfast in the hope of our Lord Jesus Christ. Also in Chapter 1, Paul wrote that the Thessalonians had not only become imitators of him and his companions but that they had become an example to all the believers in the whole of Macedonia right down to Achaia. This was a glowing testimony! These were genuine conversions and their reputation had gone forth everywhere.

As we come to chapter 2 you'll find that we are given here, a blueprint or a pattern for a successful gospel outreach ministry. So if you want a pattern for a successful ministry in reaching the world with the gospel we can find it here in 1 Thessalonian 2. You will also find that integrity plays a big part in a successful gospel ministry.

Definition of Integrity

Integrity is a word that, when used to describe someone, is the quality of being honest, having strong moral principles. When we use the word 'integrity' to describe something, we can say that it's the quality of being whole or complete. Other words we can associate with this concept can be truthful, consistent and it is not impaired or tainted.

The Integrity of the Message:

V2 We had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel;
V4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak,
V8 being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves
V9 while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

The message here is the 'Gospel of God' and the keyword there in verse 4 is that the gospel of God has been entrusted to us. It's not an invention of men. It's the divine revelation of God. It is not found in human's mind or in any wisdom literatures anywhere else in this world, it is something that God has given to us and entrusted to us. When we use the word 'entrust', we mean *we give something to someone to safeguard*. So as we approach the gospel we have to understand that it is a revelation of God, something that we are to safeguard it from corruption.

Where is the gospel of God to be found?

13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

We see that the gospel is found in the word of God. The gospel is also a demanding message. In verse 12, it's a message that insist that those who believe in it experience a change in orientation, a change in desire from pleasing self to pleasing God. It's a message that asks men, women, boys and girls to repent of their sins and turn to Jesus in obedience to His calling. We read in verse 2 that gives us a clue as to the circumstances in which the gospel came to Thessalonica.

V2 But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

The circumstances in which Paul and his team had come to the Thessalonians, is that they had come from the city of Philippi. We know from the account in Acts 16 and 17. We read there that Paul and Silas were beaten, tortured and thrown into Jail. God sent an earthquake to break

them free and as a result of that incident, the Philippian jailer and his entire family came to be saved. When they came to Thessalonica their wounds were probably still fresh. Now Paul and his companions could have rested and waited for the right moment to preach, but they did not do such thing and instead they went straight to the synagogue and boldly preached the Gospel. Now the account in Acts tell us that as soon as some of the Jews and Greeks started to come to faith, persecution from the Jews arose.

Why were the Jews so offended?

We know that every time when we preach the gospel and when conversion happens, almost always you will find persecution and opposition. That is because the gospel inherently is an offensive message. The Jews find it offensive because the gospel tells them that by their own good works they could never earn their way to God. Telling Jews that Jesus Christ was their messiah is really an indictment to them as they have crucified Him. Jews heavily relied on their good works in order to gain favor from God. The gospel is therefore an offensive message for them.

Try telling a non-believer today that he/she is a sinner and have been living in rebellion against God and try telling them that their eternal destination is separation from God in hell and it's all their fault. This message will be offensive to them. That's why Paul says in 1 Cor 1:22

22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to gentiles,

Yet we don't find Paul, Silas and Timothy backing off from preaching the true gospel. Now they could have easily tried to alter the message in order for the gospel to be less offensive. Unfortunately, this is how many churches have reacted today. Today sadly, in an attempt to appeal to men, many so-called Christian churches preach a defective gospel that makes no demands on the believer. We have churches today that are run like big business corporations where the gospel is a product that is tailored to the latest consumer preferences and celebrity pastors that are at the centre of attention. These churches try to make it as comfortable to the seekers as possible. Dr Michael Brown who is a prominent American pastor and radio broadcaster and also an author mentioned in his book. *"For years, we have preached a cheap gospel and peddled a soft Savior. We have taught salvation without self-denial and the crown without the cross. We have catered to the unsaved and compromised with the world. Now we are paying the price."*

It is not uncommon for us to have churches where we have huge numbers and yet how many of them are really genuine believers because they have been exposed to a defective gospel.

The result is, even amongst well-meaning and God-fearing Christians, sometimes we unconsciously or unwittingly communicate a man-centered gospel as opposed to a God-centered gospel.

What is the difference between them?

- A man-centered gospel defines our lives in terms of what we “need” or want most. The biblical gospel rightly recognizes that none of us fundamentally live to ourselves, but to God (Rom. 14:7-9).
- A man-centered gospel considers our needs and our desires to be our most fundamental problems. The true gospel recognizes that to sin against God and face his wrath is the most fundamental problem imaginable.

So a man-centered gospel focuses on man’s needs whereas a God-centered gospel focuses on God’s glory. Man-centered, what can God do for me. God-centered, what can I do for God. Evangelical Christians have come up with a lot of cliché that we use and when we preach the gospel sometimes we use the word ‘accept Jesus’ instead of ‘submitting to Jesus’. Is that just semantics or does it betray an unconscious desire in our hearts to want to make the gospel a little bit less offensive. If we use the term ‘accept Jesus’, we are in fact exchanging our position with Christ, we have put Christ the savior under our judgment and it is up to us whether we accept him or not. The verse that is often quoted is Rev 3:20 (**I stand at the door and knock**) and presumably Christ is knocking at the door for you to open the door of your heart so that you can receive him. It is almost as if Jesus Christ is portrayed as a jilted suitor begging to come in and it is up to you to be the judge of whether he should or should not come into your life. If you have studied the Bible long enough you will realize that Rev 3:20 is actually quoted out of context in that particular instance. The verse is actually a verse directed at the church, the Christian and it is Christ standing at the door of the church asking them to repent, right before he would step inside, otherwise he would consign the church to eternal damnation. It is not a message for the non-Christian.

Nowhere in the bible is that notion of us accepting Jesus, yes we accept God’s free gift of salvation, we receive it. Better to use the word ‘to submit’, because that is what it really is. We need to preach a gospel that demands a change in life. The Bible is full of references that says repent and believe. By repentance we mean a turning away from your sin and turning towards God. So as we preach the gospel, let us be mindful to use the language of the Bible and not our own terms.

Let go and let God is very common amongst the evangelical churches today. To say, we surrender our life and we don’t really need to work after we have believed in Jesus Christ, our eternal salvation is secured and therefore just rest in his love. The moral laws and the

commandments doesn't apply to us anymore, but the Bible doesn't teach that, the Bible tells us to hold fast to the faith, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. The Bible gives us a picture of an athlete, who works hard to achieve his goal. So we have to work hard as an athlete.

A man-centered gospel has a very low view of God. God becomes a part of the busy schedule. A high view of God says, I am part of God's great commission. It is easy for people to label themselves as Christians, it is much-much more difficult to call yourself a Christian as well as a disciple.

At the end of the day, any attempt to soften the gospel message is a failure to trust in the power of God. Jesus says, "My sheep will hear my voice and they will follow me"; "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. Jesus told the apostle Peter "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Jesus will build his church and we are just his instruments. We are just his tools, privileged enough to share in the Great Commission. Jesus will build his church; our job is simply to obey God's commandment to faithfully preach the true gospel of God.

The Integrity of the Method:

When Paul came to the Jewish synagogue, he, Silas and Timothy did not change into costumes and started to act out the gospel. Neither did he form a 3-piece band and started singing about God's plan of salvation. He didn't come and perform miracles or hold large healing rallies in order to convert or persuade people to believe in Jesus Christ. Of course, some of these things have their proper place at the proper time and many of them may actually be very useful, but they can never replace God's chosen mean to save his people and that's through the preaching of God's word.

V2"But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

V13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us,

So there is a declaring, speaking and there is preaching and listening.

2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. **3** For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, **4** and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 2 Tim 4:2-4

Preaching is not just the job of a person who stands on the pulpit. It is our job.

Acts 1:8. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria.

All Christians are asked to be witnesses for Christ and therefore it is our duty as Christians to be conversant with the gospel in order to preach it to the unbelieving world. So the question is, are we equipping ourselves? Are we diligently applying ourselves to the study of God's word? The bible clearly links preaching to evangelism.

13 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” **14** How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? **15** And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” **16** But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” **17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10: 13-17

So if evangelism is closely tied to preaching, are we as a church doing enough in our missionary work. Are we actually sending out people from the church to other countries, to other parts of Malaysia in order to preach the gospel to the unsaved because that is God's ordained means of calling his people to himself.

The Integrity of the Messenger:

The 3rd mark of a successful gospel outreach ministry is this: The messenger of the gospel must be a person of integrity. If we are to have success in our evangelism, our life must match what we stand for! We must walk the talk and if we speak the gospel, our life must reflect that.

Now in the passage that we have read notice how Paul was asking the Thessalonians to validate his character based on their experience of him when they were together.

3 For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive.

In other words, Paul was asking the Thessalonian Christians to judge his motives. They did not come to trick them. They did not come with impure motives in order to gain something from the Thessalonian Christians. In verse 4 they could see that he wasn't interested in pleasing men but Paul's primary aim is to please God. You can't save men by pleasing him, you save him by pleasing God. Paul didn't use flattery, which technically means an insincere praise spoken only because you want something back in return. In verse 6, even though he could have demanded financial support from the church there, he didn't exercise that right. But instead...

9 For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God

It is well within the rights of the apostle to be supported by the church, but he didn't want people to accuse him of benefiting unfairly or taking advantage of the Christians in Thessalonica. So Paul and his companions worked night and day in order to support themselves while waiting for relief from the church in Philippi as we read in Acts.

10 You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.

That is a very bold statement. The Thessalonians were witnesses to how holy, righteous and blameless they were. How many of us could say that of ourselves? But Paul could.

Why is that he was able to so confidently say that he was blameless, righteous and holy?

You see, the thing that stands out in these verses and that characterize these men was that as they were ministering to the Thessalonian Christians, they were more conscious of the presence of God than the presence of man. They were more keenly aware that they were actually doing God's work than they were trying to please man and that's the key. God does not save sinner as an end in itself. That is not the chief end of why God saves us. God saves us to display his glory.

If our lives do not display the fruit of the gospel and reflect God's image, why would anyone want to listen to our message? If we are to attract non-believers, we have to be mindful of our walk, our lifestyle and that is a much better way of attracting nonbelievers to come into the church rather than to tweak the message or to tweak the method. Better to live out the gospel and thereby glorify God so that people could see a difference in us that they would be attracted to come to you.

We all put on a mask to varying degree. Is our life on Sunday the same as it is on other days? Is our private life that no one sees, the same as the one that the public sees? The acid test is when nobody sees and only God sees, how do we behave. Are there any secret sins that we are hiding. Now you will find that if you are not living according to God's will or in obedience to his commandment it becomes very difficult to share the gospel, because our lives are inconsistent with the gospel message.

The Integrity of our Manner:

Now we could have a good message, we may be obeying God's ordained means of spreading that message, we may live holy lives but there is one more ingredient that is necessary and that's the integrity of our manner. That kinds of complete the entire picture. It is the manner in which we approach the ministry. The manner in which we share the gospel with our nonbelieving friends. It has to be filled with love.

V7 But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

Now the gospel message is an offensive message but that doesn't mean that you can be offensive.

V11 For you know how, like a father with his children, 12 we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Paul gives us a picture of how he approaches his ministry. He gives us a picture of a nursing mother. A nursing mother with young baby has to wake up at nights most of the time to feed her baby and she always has to be on her toes for the baby. So just as a nursing mother Paul treats his congregation with that kind of love.

The bible is very balanced, it is not just having love, love and love, but we also have discipline and that's where Paul gives us the picture of a loving father. A strong loving father who exhorts his child, encourage the child and charge the child to walk in a manner worthy of God. So if the child were to stray for example the father brings him back with a straighten arrow. So the bible is very-very complete and that does the integrity of the entire ministry. Gentleness, love, compassion on one hand, strength, discipline and instruction on the other.

Summary:

- The integrity of the message we have to preach, the gospel that is true to the word of God, balanced, love as well as judgment.
- Integrity of the method, preaching as the ordained means of spreading the gospel.
- The integrity of the messenger is very important too.
- We must always approach the nonbelieving world with love and compassion.